COMMUNICATING THE EMERGING ROLES · OF · LIBRARIANS TO TEACHERS THROUGH A COLLABORATIVE K-12 · AND · HIGHER EDUCATION PARTNERSHIP

How can practicing school librarians and library educators help teachers and administrators understand what school librarians can do to positively impact student achievement and encourage schools to support these roles?

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School Librarians in Wisconsin

Ask teachers in a variety of schools what the role of a school librarian is, and you will get a different answer from every teacher you ask. Teachers' perceptions are based largely on the school librarians with whom they have interacted in their own schooling and in their careers as educators. Some see the school librarian as the person who checks out books. Others see the librarian as the person who gathers resources for units. Teachers may see the role as that of a person who reads to children, conducts reading-promotion activities, and recommends books. Some may say the role is to be the person who teaches skills to classes each week or who works with students on research skills during a unit. Many will say the school librarian is the person with technology knowledge who keeps other educators abreast of new tools and strategies and helps when things don't work. While all of these responses may reflect facets of the job, none fully defines today's school librarians and the roles they can play in supporting learning, developing students' (and teachers') 21st-century skills, and helping lead the way as schools develop a new learning environment. As the profession seeks new recruits, how do prospective candidates view the job?

In the midst of financial challenges and the need to support technology integration, districts are required to make difficult decisions about priorities that impact the world of school librarianship when library positions are eliminated or become shared between multiple schools. As many school librarians reach retirement age and fewer individuals enter the profession, a number of districts are struggling to bring in qualified professionals and are recruiting from among their current teachers.

At the same time, the field has evolved to incorporate more technology integration, curriculum leadership, collaboration with teachers to develop students' 21st-century skills and meet Common Core State Standards, professional development, and support of multiple literacies, in addition to traditional librarian roles. However, this reality is not the image of school librarians held by many principals and the teachers they are recruiting. In some school districts, librarians haven't yet adopted some of these changes or are spread thinly, so they can't fully meet all these responsibilities and help their teachers and principals see what is possible.

How can practicing school librarians and library educators help teachers and administrators understand what school librarians can do to positively impact student achievement and encourage schools to support these roles? In an effort to help fill open positions and continue moving the profession forward, how can current school librarians and library educators identify good teachers and convince them that school librarianship is a viable career option?

In Wisconsin school librarians are required to have a teaching license before becoming certified as school librarians, so focusing on attracting experienced teachers interested in a second license is important to growing the profession. Wisconsin school library licensure has been available through one of the two ALA-accredited on-campus programs, through UW-Milwaukee's online program or through four comprehensive state colleges that offer school library state-accredited licensure programs. As of summer 2016, the on-campus programs will be reduced to just the two ALA-accredited master's programs and one of the comprehensive state-college programs. In the late 1990s, to meet the needs of teachers spread around the state who want to become school librarians but are not within reasonable driving distance of one of the on-campus programs, the University of Wisconsin School Library Education Consortium (UWSSLEC) was created to supplement the on-campus programs. The University of Wisconsin campuses at Whitewater, Eau Claire, Oshkosh, Madison, and Superior banded together to offer all the coursework in a hybrid format (i.e., a single two- to three-day meeting per class with the rest online). This program was tailored to the needs of practicing teachers moving into the field, with particular focus on recruiting teachers from remote areas so they could continue working as teachers while studying school librarianship.
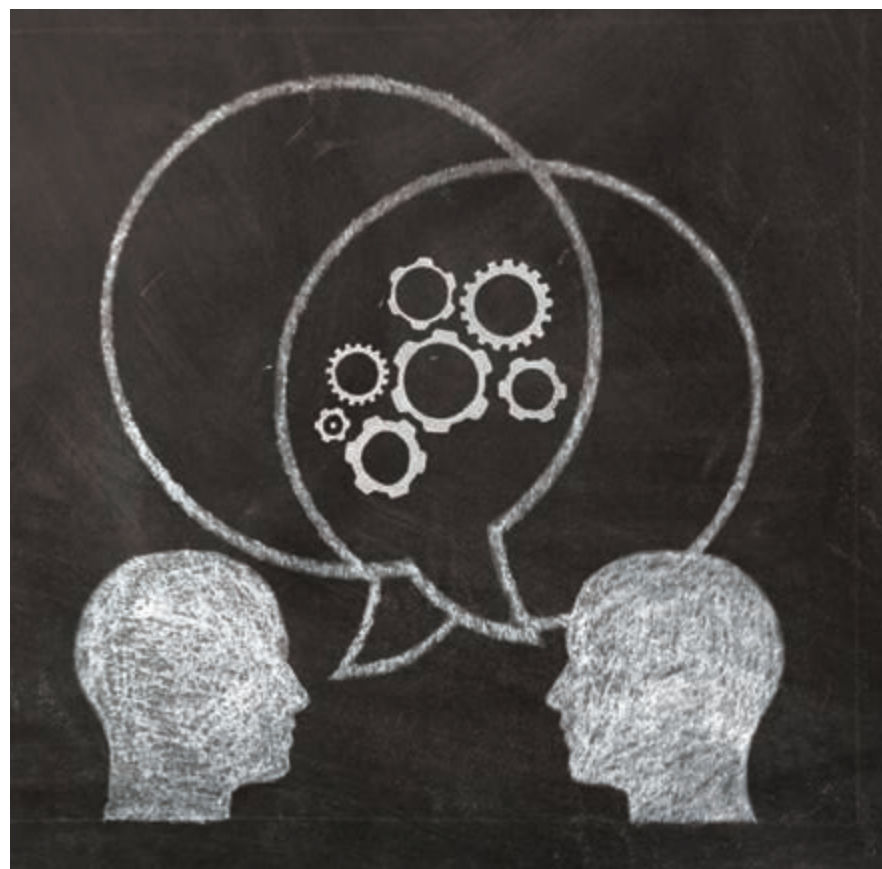
Emerging Roles of Librarians Program

Planning

In 2010 the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) responded to rapid changes in school libraries by convening the *Wisconsin School Library Summit: Envisioning 21st Century Learners and School Library Media Programs*. Summit participants discussed the future of school libraries in Wisconsin. During the summit, several workgroups were created to address specific needs in the field. Since then, AASL has developed new standards for preparation of school librarians, and Wisconsin adopted an Educator Effectiveness model for teacher evaluation, bringing about additional changes.

In 2014 a workgroup that, at the summit, had been assigned the task of creating a current job description for school librarians reconvened to update job description materials created in 2010 and to create new materials that would be useful to school librarians participating in the Educator Effectiveness evaluation model. As the group began its work, discussions about the need for advocacy generated ideas about what could be done to preserve and restore librarian positions in schools, how highly qualified teachers may be encouraged to enter the field, and how small districts can restore library services by identifying and recruiting existing staff members who can become certified as librarians while on the job. The group wondered, "Could we do something fun in the summer that would help accomplish these things?"

As an answer to the workgroup's question, the authors of this article, representing library education and the K–12 librarians in the workgroup, formed a leadership team, brainstormed ideas with the DPI library consultant, and proposed a program called Wisconsin's Emerging Roles of Librarians (ERL). The ERL program was supported by the state's library education consortium (UWSSLEC), the Wisconsin Educational Media and Technology Association (WEMTA, the state professional organization), and the state Department of Public Instruction. The program included a summer workshop, offered in three locations around the state.

The workshop was designed to educate teachers—and, subsequently, their administrators—about how the roles of school librarians have evolved, share the positive impact these roles can have on student achievement, and provide hands-on

experiences to help participants develop knowledge and skills they could take back to their classrooms in the fall. To encourage an interest in entering the field, participants would also be given information about certification programs and provided with contact information for practicing school librarians who were willing to answer questions, host school library visits, and act as mentors.

While the leadership team worked to secure funding and facilities, another team was formed to plan and implement the workshop: the ERL Librarian Team. This team of eight innovative educators with exceptional skills in a variety of areas was created using a process similar to a fantasy football draft; invitations were sent to librarians with various areas of expertise and degrees of experience, from all areas

of Wisconsin and from schools of different sizes and grade levels. The resulting group was an energetic team of powerful collaborators with skills in a variety of areas, including inquiry learning, technology integration, instructional teaming, personalized learning, fiction and nonfiction literature, professional development, and leadership. The team's responsibility was to develop and lead a curriculum for the workshop that would provide classroom teachers with an understanding of the position, offer opportunities for hands-on learning, inspire increased collaboration with librarians upon return to their schools, and encourage information-sharing and advocacy with administrators.

The eight ERL Librarian Team members considered AASL's *Standards for the 21st-Century Learner*

and *ALA/AASL Standards for Initial Preparation of School Librarians* while designing sessions that would both introduce teachers to best practices in school libraries and engage them in the kind of activities a teacher might do with a librarian. The eight team members brainstormed major topics for the workshop, including inquiry and collaboration, technology integration, support for personal interests and reading, and leadership and administration. The planners then divided (based on interest areas) into teams of two to four librarians. Each small planning team developed activities, collected resources, and gathered authentic examples of work school librarians in Wisconsin do that positively impacts students and teachers. All materials were uploaded to a Google Site that was shared with participants and their administrators.

Strong partnerships and effective communication between K–12 librarians, higher education programs, DPI, WEMTA, and regional educational agencies (cooperative educational services agencies or CESAs) were vital to the success of the planning process. With guidance from the leadership team, each organization provided skills and resources and collaborated effectively. For example, UW-Whitewater and UWSSLEC provided funds for the ERL Librarian Team to meet for planning, supported stipends and travel expenses for workshop planning and presentation, funded publicity, and provided food for workshop participants. DPI provided participant stipends that helped cover travel costs. CESA 2, CESA 5, and CESA 10 provided flexible learning spaces, supported by current technologies. Those same groups worked with WEMTA to develop and carry

out publicity and recruitment, activities which included notices to e-mail discussion lists and online newsletters that reached district administrators, curriculum directors, WEMTA members, and DPI groups; a letter to all district administrators and curriculum directors in Wisconsin; and e-mails and postcards to all of the state's school librarians.

Implementation

Practicing school librarians and administrators nominated potential workshop participants based on attributes the librarians and administrators felt contribute to success as a school librarian. Nominations from principals included the following descriptors: good teacher (talented, dedicated, diligent, veteran), technology skills, literacy/literature focus, collaborative, good team member, innovator, leadership skills, lifelong learner, passionate, engaging personality. Nominated participants then completed a pre-workshop survey to share their reasons for attending. Examples include the following:

- Interested in learning about the field and possibly moving into it (twenty-three responses)
- Currently in or moving into a librarian position before completion of certification (five responses)
- Love technology, want to learn something new to relay to other staff, want to advocate for the position, etc. (one to two responses)

Three workshops were offered, with a limit of twenty participants registered for each workshop. The first two, in southern and central Wisconsin, filled to capacity. The third, in northern Wisconsin, filled to approximately fifty percent capacity. Three to four ERL

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Librarian Team members facilitated and led each workshop; the library education faculty member and the DPI library consultant provided additional support. Participants were given a graphic organizer arranged into boxes for recording information to be used when returning to their schools. The box titles represented some of the major themes for the day, such as support for students, support for teachers, leading, managing, and needed qualities.

The following is an outline of workshop content and activities.

Opening Discussions—The ERL Librarian Team facilitated discussions about how roles of school librarians have evolved in the face of a changing economy and pervasive technologies. Participants worked in small groups to discuss what the roles of school librarians were when the participants were in school compared to school librarians' roles today, and then shared their thoughts and ideas with the whole group.

Collaboration and Inquiry/ Support of Curriculum and Student Learning—The ERL Librarian Team shared an overview of how school librarians can effectively collaborate with classroom teachers. Next, they discussed the inquiry process, technology tools that support inquiry projects, and selection of and access to resources that support the curriculum through the physical and virtual library. Participants practiced using some of the tools (e.g., online field trips, Chrome apps and extensions, various tools for creating content and sharing learning with others). They also explored collection-development sites and online databases.

Literature and Literacy/ Personal Learning Interests—Participants learned how school librarians promote reading through quality collection development, book talks, events, and other activities. The ERL Librarian Team shared how they meet students' personal learning interests in a variety of areas through competitions and makerspace activities. Participants were encouraged to try various activities, including coding, creating circuits using Makey Makey devices, making origami boxes, and producing videos using an iPad and green-screen effects.

Program Facilitation and Leadership—The ERL Librarian Team shared how a day in the life of a school librarian is different from that of a classroom teacher and explained how leadership and building influence are

vital components of a school librarian's position. They shared roles librarians play in professional development for classroom teachers. Participants discussed their own professional learning needs and had the opportunity to begin to build a professional learning network using social media that would help to meet those needs.

Moving Forward—The library educator outlined options for licensure and shared information on programs around the state. Participants were asked to take information from the workshops back to their administrators in the fall and completed an exit survey.

Impact

A comparison of pre-workshop survey results with survey results from after the workshops indicates an increased understanding of emerging roles of school librarians in Wisconsin.

Registrants had been invited to complete a pre-workshop online survey that asked them about their reasons for attending and what they identified as the most important responsibilities of the school librarian. Thirty-four of the forty-eight registrants completed this survey, each listing three or four responsibilities. The roles most often mentioned by respondents included the following:

- Teaching, research guide/coach (twenty-eight responses)
- Support of reading: fostering love of reading, literature appreciation, reading promotion, supporting literacy (twenty-four responses)
- Development and management of collections (twenty-five responses)
- Technology support and integration (seventeen responses)
- Program administrator (fourteen responses)
- Collaboration with teachers (eleven responses)
- Information specialist/resource for teachers (eleven responses)

Individuals also mentioned supporting a love of learning, nurturing creativity, and providing new avenues for learning. The majority of the responses focused on traditional roles of teaching, literacy support, and collection development, but there was some appreciation of the school librarian's role in supporting appropriate uses of technology, working with teachers to support learning, serving as a resource expert, and supporting students as they become creative lifelong learners in personalized learning environments.

While fifty participants registered, only about forty participants attended one of the three workshops, and thirty-five completed a post-workshop survey before leaving the site. They were asked how their perception of the school librarian's roles had changed, which things they were taking away from the workshop that would be useful to them, and whether they were considering seeking licensure. Many said they had a new appreciation for the emerging roles of the school librarian, and some said the workshop reaffirmed what they thought school librarians should be doing or expanded that view in some way. Participants mentioned the following roles as *new* to them:

- Leadership and bringing about change (eight responses)
- Collaboration with teachers (nine responses)
- Technology support and integration (eight responses)
- Professional development (six responses)
- Teaching (four responses)
- Advocacy (two responses)
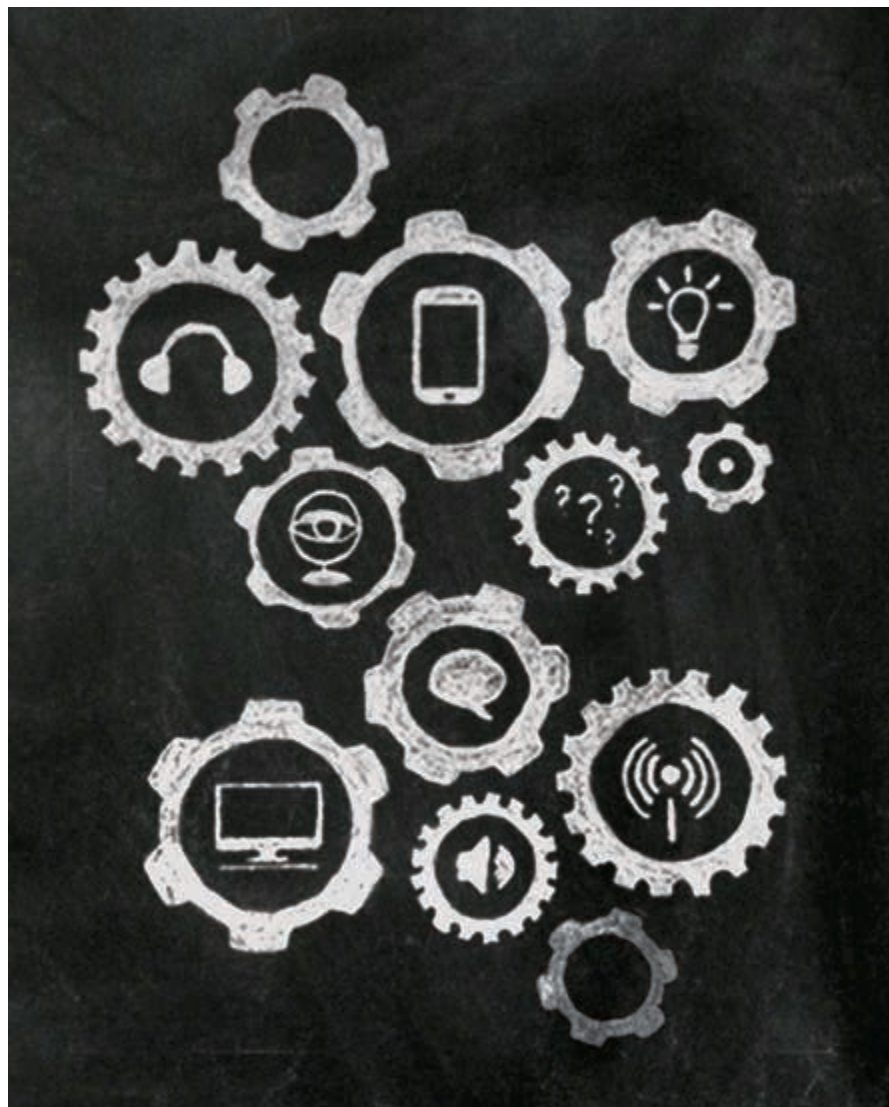- Supporting reading (two responses)

The participants recognized the pieces that could allow the school librarian—with specialized expertise, collaboration, and leadership skills—to help shape the entire learning environment.

- Selecting and providing resources (two responses)
- Engaging in school-wide initiatives (one response)

While many came into the workshops understanding the role of the school librarian in teaching skills, supporting reading, and developing collections, the workshops helped increase the number who saw technology integration, professional development, and leadership roles as important. A number of participants said they didn't realize how many hats a school librarian wore or the amount of work in the job. The participants recognized the pieces that could allow the school librarian—with specialized expertise, collaboration, and leadership skills—to help shape the entire learning environment.

However, what wasn't reflected in the responses on rethinking school librarian roles was how these leadership, professional development, collaboration, and technology roles could allow the librarian to help change the types of learning occurring in schools. Librarians support the development of skills in creativity and innovation, allow learning to be personalized for individual students, encourage a hunger for learning, and take learning outside the world of the classroom. For those entering the library education licensure program, future coursework addresses how combining these emerging roles with that of a change agent can support educational reform and the mission of schools.

Survey results also indicated potential impact on enrollment in school library programs in Wisconsin. When asked if they were considering moving into the school

library field after the workshop, twenty-four said *yes* and nine said *maybe*. As of May 2015 eight workshop participants were enrolled in the UWSSLEC program; several others were still considering enrolling or seeking enrollment in another library education program.

ERL program participants were not the only benefactors of the workshops. Each participant was asked to take knowledge of librarians' roles acquired in the workshop back to their administrators to start a discussion about what librarians can do to support students and teachers.

Administrators were sent letters after the workshops to inform them of their nominee's workshop completion and to expect information-sharing on their return.

In addition, participants increased their knowledge and skills in a way that had the potential to strengthen collaboration with their current librarians upon the participants' return to school. Six of the participants commented in the post-workshop survey that they learned many things they could use in their own classroom or ask for in collaboration with their own school

librarian. Eighteen mentioned the value of the tools and websites shared during the workshops, and seven specifically mentioned the makerspace activities. Eleven felt they learned the value of collaboration, communication, and building relationships. Four took new reading-motivation ideas back with them. Several mentioned the value of learning about good library programs and meeting enthusiastic, skilled school librarians who shared librarian roles they had never seen in their own teaching careers. Other takeaways included information on certification, professional development ideas, inquiry strategies, the need for a qualified librarian, the importance of staying current, and how one's teaching background carries over into a school library position.

The workshops have also benefitted members of the ERL Librarian Team and library education programs. Members of the ERL Librarian Team developed a strong professional network through workshop planning and implementation, building their own areas of expertise, and learning from each other. They continue to remain in contact to share ideas, have done a presentation at the WEMTA annual conference, and will present at a conference sponsored by the state's school and district administrator organizations. Several have also taken on mentoring participants.

UWSSLEC and the on-campus library education programs have experienced an increase in the number of students enrolled, as mentioned above, and have also incorporated ideas and examples presented at the workshops, from makerspace examples to technology tools in the inquiry process

to literature-support ideas to effective library websites. Members of the ERL Librarian Team have also volunteered as guest speakers in library education classes and as host sites for practicum placements.

Finally, the planning and implementation of the workshops has strengthened partnerships between the library education programs, the Department of Public Instruction, Wisconsin Educational Media and Technology Association, regional education agencies, and experienced professional school librarians. As Wisconsin moves forward with developing a revised job description and tools for librarian evaluation and as library education programs change to meet the needs of the state and the profession, the lines of communication and sharing have been strengthened by these workshops.

The ERL program met its original goals of developing and leading workshops that would provide classroom teachers with an understanding of the position, offer opportunities for hands-on learning, inspire increased collaboration with librarians upon return to their schools, and encourage information-sharing and advocacy with administrators. As a result of the workshops, almost forty more teachers across Wisconsin have an enhanced idea of the emerging roles of librarians and could take ideas back to their schools to start the discussion of how the knowledge and skills of the school librarian are vital for development of 21st-century skills and supporting personalized learning. The ERL program will continue to communicate to teachers in Wisconsin the emerging roles of school librarians while advocating for vital school librarian positions in our schools.

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She is the coordinator of the UWSSLEC program, has been teaching school library and technology courses since 1993, and was previously a school and academic librarian. She has been on the board of the Wisconsin Educational Media and Technology Association. Most recently she has published (with Anne Zarinnia and several graduate students) "Simplifying and Expanding Collaboration through Collaborative Websites: Using Technology Wisely" *in* Collaborative Models for Librarian and Teacher Partnerships, *edited by Kathryn Kennedy and Lucy Santos Green (Information Science Reference 2014).*

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